

Note Sheet No. 1

February 15, 1942

Circus Day in Guelph, Ontario, Canada almost 60 years ago!

BARNUM & LONDON United Monster Show
Guelph, Tuesday - July 10th, 1883

The newspaper ads heralded this as
"JUMBO'S Greeting to his Canadian Friends"

Features for the parade were 33 Golden Tableau cars, "jewelled and gold trimmed wardrobe; Roman Glint and Glamour, Cunning surprises, Sun-Eclipsing magnificence, Dazzling gorgeousness and matchless splendor". In addition the show boasted a herd of 29 elephants and one nursing baby, together with Giraffes and Zebras in harness, 32 camels, and a Transparent Glass Car of serpents and Female Hindoo Snake Charmer in full view. The Museum boasted GOSHEN the 8-foot giant, little people, Dog-faced Man, Aztecs, Last of the Montezumes, Wild girl, Circassians, and "1,000 wonderful and curious freaks."

The Guelph Newspaper of that day spoke of the show and parade as follows:

"Barnum's Greatest Show on Earth reached Guelph by special trains of 54 cars early this morning. The process of unloading the horses, wild beasts, and gorgeous cars occupied until nine o'clock.....The cavalcade was headed by a magnificent band chariot; ten pairs of beautiful steeds richly caparisoned and bearing brilliantly dressed riders of the arena; dens of lions, tigers, hyenas, leopards, bears and jaguars with a man sitting in each and placidly petting the beautiful and submissive creatures; a Chime of Silver Bells; then another band wagon, with a fine Military Band; an eight horse chariot supporting an immense globe; more animal wagons; six beautiful black Arabian steeds; another band wagon; more animal dens; many more riders on beautiful trained steeds; clown and pony, and a sonorous-voiced Orchestrion; Then a lot of camels and dromedaries harnessed to vehicles and Roman Chariots; a pair of zebras--animals of quite different stripe; more wagons; two ladies each driving four fiery horses abreast; many more highly ornated wagons, with Zulus and other such persons sitting on them; Shetland ponies...with more Shetland ponies dragging a chariot representing Santa Claus and his team of reindeers; eight horse chariots representing the Old Woman who lived in a shoe; Gilt Peacock Chariot; more Zulus and Indians and negroes in gilt chariots and drawn by harnessed elephants; car with pipers in highland costumes and other features too numerous to mention; the whole closing with a grand steam calliope whose musical notes were sent reverberating throughout the City. It was decidedly the largest and BEST street parade ever seen in Guelph...There is no doubt but Barnum is now in possession of the Best Show he ever owned, and that however much he may have been given to fooling the public in the past there is no sell about him this time.....Barnum's show certainly excels.

As stated above JUMBO was featured in the ads for this year (1883). Jumbo returned to Canada and to Guelph with the Barnum & London 9 Giant Shows United Forever! on September 11th 1885 - only four days before the Famous Elephant met his death in St. Thomas, Ont., Canada. Guelph was, therefore, among the last cities to see Jumbo alive. It may be of interest to know that P. T. Barnum's Greatest Show on Earth returned to Guelph on Saturday, September 11th 1887, and Jumbo's skeleton - together with Alice - Jumbo's companion - were features of the circus that year. As many of you know, Jumbo's hide was stuffed and presented by Barnum to Tuft's College, Boston, Mass., where it remains until this day.

From a very early newspaper advertisement I find that Sloat Shepard's Great Northern Circus visited Guelph on May 18th, 1857. Can anyone tell me if this "Sloat Shepard" could by any chance be the same name referred to a few years later in the Nixon Royal Circus and SLOAT'S, New York Circus combination. This latter did not show here so far as I can find out - but I have an advertisement for Hartford, Conn., U.S.A. for July 8th and 9th, 1861. I shall be glad to hear from collectors in this connection.

The above historical notes were compiled from original newspaper ads and papers in the circusiana collection of Walter W. Tyson, Guelph, Ontario, Canada.

